

Dialogue in dance studies research

Ann Dils; Jill Flanders Crosby

Dance Research Journal; Summer 2001; 33, 1; Research Library

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Introduction

In writing this paper, we—Jill Crosby and Ann Dils—render into text six years of sporadic dialogues. Through our explanation and examination of the 1994 movement analysis and description project that began our exchanges and discussion of subsequent readings, we hope to explore important aspects of dance studies research. Our use and understanding of Laban-based movement analysis as a tool for understanding movement as it is felt and observed, awareness of concepts of dialogue and the dialogical process as potential frameworks, critical lenses, and theoretical bases for dance studies research, and adaptation of the interpretive paradigm to suit dance research are especially important to this exploration.¹ Little of our text is written in dialogue form (Crosby:, Dils:); rather, we hope, by drawing examples from our project, Crosby's dissertation, and the works of other researchers, to capture the bubbling-up of understanding that stems from the cooperative and confrontational exchanges of dance studies research.

Over a three-month period in 1994, we conducted a movement analysis and description project as part of Crosby's work for her doctoral dissertation, "Will the Real Jazz Dance Please Stand Up? A Critical Examination of the Roots and Essence of Jazz Dance with Implications for Education." Crosby investigated the aesthetic shapings of jazz expression inclusive of its West African roots from a cross-disciplinary perspective, using ethnographic methods as tools for understanding artistic form (Crosby 1995). An arts educator and dancer, Crosby wanted to establish a pool of descriptive and potentially inherent characteristics for music-based jazz dance.² These characteristics would comprise a personal definition for the form and provide Crosby with a point of departure for a discussion of jazz as a movement tradition. Important to her study was an understanding of the historical development of jazz dance and the meaning of the dance forms important to jazz history within their various cultural contexts. Equally important was an understanding of the experiential process of dancing as a key fieldwork activity.³

Ann Dils teaches courses in dance history and dance research and writing in the Department of Dance, University of North Carolina, Greensboro. Dils (along with Ann Cooper Albright) is co-editor of Moving History/Dancing Culture: A Dance History Reader (Wesleyan, 2001). Other recent work includes essays appearing in Performing Arts Journal, Dance Research Journal, and The Korean Journal for Dance Studies.

Jill Flanders Crosby is Associate Professor and Coordinator of the Dance Program at the University of Alaska, Anchorage. She has an Ed.D. from Teachers College, Columbia University, and received a 1998 Fulbright research award for Ghana, West Africa. She is currently conducting research in Cuba. She has previously published in the Dutch anthropological journal Etnofoor and recently appeared in performance as a guest artist with the XSIGHT! Performance Group of Chicago.

Crosby conducted fieldwork for twenty-one months in Ghana, West Africa, and in New York City, then worked with Dils, a movement analyst, during the summer months of 1994. Our project involved analyzing Crosby's fieldwork videotapes, archival videotapes from individual collections and from the Dance Division of The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, and our joint experience of New York City dance classes and social dance events.

When we finished the project, we had developed descriptive phrases and an analytic foundation that would serve Crosby in the writing of her dissertation. We saw dialogue—both our verbal exchanges and those we made playing between theory and practice and between observing and doing—as central to our work. Our interactions had the productive feel of ethnographic fieldwork as realized through the interpretive paradigm; our dialogues were not simple exchanges of information, but negotiations of meaning. Through our dialogues we had established a context-specific means of analyzing movement materials that fulfilled the needs of the study, honored the nature of the dances, made best use of our individual backgrounds, and analyzed and described a broad range of movement behavior.⁴ We had also begun to see the whole research process—from library research, to fieldwork, to discussions with faculty members, to writing—as dialogic, characterized by a back-and-forth process that pushed understanding. In turn, Crosby's dissertation took on a dialogical frame, as she wove together diverse research experiences. We presented our initial findings at the 1995 Congress on Research in Dance conference, then continued our dialogues as we worked over time toward this paper.

An important resource for our understanding of dialogue as a research process was James Clifford's 1988 *The Predicament of Culture*. Clifford's work had been important to our early readings in interpretive anthropology, a paradigm that honors aesthetic and bodily experiences as ethnographic evidence. With our 1998 rereading, we were also able to place dialogue within a larger frame of research processes:

Experiential, interpretive, dialogical, and polyphonic processes are at work, discordantly in any ethnography, but coherent presentation presupposes a controlling mode of authority. I have argued that this imposition of coherence on an unruly textual process is now inescapably a matter of strategic choice...if ethnographic writing is alive, as I believe it is, it is struggling with-in and against these possibilities. (Clifford 1988, 54)

Many aspects of Clifford's "processes" resonated with our work: Crosby's insistence that her experience of moving be kept central to the text; her desire to interpret her findings from the standpoints of dancer, ethnographer, and arts educator; our appreciation of the dialogues that helped us hone our visions, craft descriptions, and push our understandings; and Crosby's management of the many voices of fieldwork and academic training in her final text. We recognized all of Clifford's processes as important to our project. Dialogue, however—both literal and metaphoric—was central to our work, infusing and informing each of the other processes. In our paper, we first discuss dialogue and the dialogical process as a critical lens and theoretical stance. We then turn to a discussion of the experiential, interpretive, and polyphonic aspects of our project and the impact dialogue had on our understanding of each. As a

conclusion, we explore dialogue and Clifford's framework, as they provide a fluid set of possibilities through which to realize dance research.

Dialogue and the Dialogical Process

The terms dialogue and dialogical process are in current use in at least several fields—anthropology, linguistics, communications studies, education, social work, literary criticism, religion—and have varying definitions and applications. We found a 1995 collection of writing, *The Dialogic Emergence of Culture*, edited by Dennis Tedlock and Bruce Mannheim, especially useful. The definitions of dialogue and the dialogical process presented in their work fall generally into the categories of dialogues between people, the dialogues of research, textual dialogues, and dialogue as ontology (Tedlock and Mannheim 1995, 4–21). The first three categories provide means of critically examining research, provoking questions about the cultural and social natures of dialogues and how these influence research. The final category suggests that dialogue can be viewed as essential to the definition of cultural identity and/or to cultural change. Thus, researchers are encouraged to see human activity, rather than institutions, as central to culture.

In simplest terms, a dialogue is a conversation, a mutual exchange of many potential types. A dialogue between two people may seem idyllic, conjuring up images of working together, sharing information and building new insights. In our project, we generally felt this way about our own exchanges. But then we were, and are, two American, middle-class, middle-aged, white, female academics with dance backgrounds at similar places in our careers. Change the parties to the exchange—as would be true in much ethnographic fieldwork and might be true in professional dialogues—and the placid façade of dialogue fractures. Make one of us white, the other black; one male, the other female; one American, the other African; one faculty, the other a graduate student, and into the exchange creep questions of power, authority, and representation.

With an opposing pair in mind, consider the possible layers of complication. (The pair need not be obviously opposed. We have layered one of our own dialogues, generated by Dils's description of us as being "at similar places in our careers" into this paragraph as example.) These two people might have different, culturally enforced or personally held, understandings about what kind of information should be shared in a dialogue or about how to conduct the conversation. They might not share bodily conversational cues of gesture, facial expression, or posture. They might be attending to different internal dialogues, based on personality or the needs of disciplines or of the project at hand, that shape the verbalized

Crosby: You were faculty; I was a graduate student.

dialogue. They might quite literally have power over or feel subservient to the other party.

Dils: You had a tenure track position at another university and were on leave. I was one year out of a Ph.D. program and adjunct faculty. Seems pretty equal to me.

The dialogical process is, in this sense, a socially and culturally based web of negotiation

Crosby: *Yes, but you were on my dissertation committee.*

that occurs in a person-to-person dialogue. Even this is a fiction; most dialogues are

Dils: *Is that a position of power or a position of advocacy?*

actually polylogues, influenced by several people and agendas. This kind of exchange does

Crosby: *What's the difference?*

not invalidate research, but makes it richer, opening up new avenues of inquiry and analysis and helping us realize and account for our assumptions and expectations.

Dialogue as a back-and-forth negotiation is not limited to a conversation between people, but can be extended to all aspects of the research process. In our own work, for example, we carried on dialogues between observing and doing movement, finding friction in the exchange between these two perspectives. We tended to think of "observer" as a more objective stance than "participant," a more subjective stance. This habit of thought, something we easily let go of through our dialogues and our work with the interpretive paradigm, is loaded with traditional preference for the visual and intellectual over the kinetic and bodily. Similar dialogues go on between our own experiences and those put forth in others' writings, our own ideas and those of the established tenets, theories, and processes of our disciplines. The dialogical process is, in this sense, a negotiation between emerging and established knowledge.

A textual dialogue occurs as field dialogues are transformed into dialogues imbedded in texts. When a researcher writes down a fieldnote or transcribes an interview, she extracts a dialogue from an emerging, ongoing exchange between people, takes it out of context, fixes it in print, then subjects it to a process of analysis and interpretation. The ideas and sensibilities of the people involved may change in a number of ways. The explanatory powers of body language and inflection and our abilities to clarify and restate are diminished to description or taken away entirely. Often, dialogue is included in the text as an example, to back up some larger generalization or theoretical point. Ideas imbedded in exchanges may be appropriated and reshaped. Credit for a particular insight or line of thought may be masked or reassigned. Parties of the exchange might come to represent a type. "Crosby" might become "Dancer" and "Dils" might become "Movement Analyst," implying, perhaps, that ideas are not individual but generally attributable to people with particular training or from a particular culture. Ultimately, the dialogue between two people becomes a new dialogue, one defined by the needs of the text, that enters into a new discipline-based dialogue, both on the page and in reading. The dialogical process is, in this sense, a recontextualization of dialogue, pulling it out of the stream of a conversation and into a text, making it material for the use and benefit of authors and readers.

On the other hand, texts might be written and read with a dialogical process in mind. The author, sensitive to the political dimensions of representing others and their words, might include more dialogue in her texts, trying to sustain and characterize the original flow, length, and contextual sense of the exchange. This extends the usefulness of the dialogue by making it reinterpretable by others. Most importantly, including dialogue or even multiple voices in a text opens the text to multiple perspectives and breaks down a single, authoritative voice.

(How a writer handles the “controlling mode of authority” is one of the “strategic choices” Clifford refers to in the previously stated quotation.) In this sense, the dialogical process is a recontextualization of dialogue, the writer pulling words out of the stream of a conversation and into a text, making them material for the use and benefit of authors and readers. Crosby was especially sensitive to opening the text to multiple voices. She expected a readership as broad as her aims—to write as ethnographer, dancer, and arts educator—and built voices representing those perspectives into her text. As a European American writing about African and African-American forms, she wanted her text informed with the experiences of varied people, especially the African and African-American musicians and dancers who were her teachers and could provide life experiences different from Crosby’s own.

Finally, dialogue and dialogical process are concepts that underpin a particular way of thinking about the world. Traditionally, culture might be seen as the amalgam of social institutions and social practices engaged in by particular people at a particular time. Considered through a dialogical lens, culture becomes emergent as institutions and practices are constantly reshaped, to a greater or lesser extent, by dialogues. Or, perhaps, culture becomes the fictional representation of human interactions, developed through multiple dialogues between fieldworkers and informants, ethnographers and established texts. In either scenario, dialogue and perhaps many human interactions, including dancing, become generative agents. Making dance something other than the repository of culture—to see dancing as leading rather than reflecting cultural change—is a favorite turn of thought for dance researchers (see Baner 1994; Daniel 1995).

Establishing a Dialogue

A Dialogue Between People and Approaches to Research

We brought different backgrounds to our movement analysis and description project. Crosby is an experienced music-based jazz and West African diaspora dancer, immersed in these forms from fieldwork and from extensive reading of pertinent ethnographies and histories. Based at the University of Ghana, Crosby studied traditional dance and traveled to three village fieldsites. She also visited neighboring Burkina Faso for a weeklong national dance festival. Fieldwork activities included formal dance classes, social dancing, and extensive dialogues with academics, dance- and musickmakers, and participants in their various communities. In New York, formal classes included music-based jazz dance, swing dance, and Cuban and Haitian dances. She also danced at weekly swing dances at Manhattan clubs and performed dances by two music-based jazz dance artists, Katherine Kramer and Billy Siegenfeld.

Dils has had experience with movement analysis and description, especially the body, space, and expression framework of Laban-based analysis. She also worked with checksheets developed by dance anthropologists and the movement studies of Albert Schefflen, Ray Birdwhistell, and François Delsarte. Although not a Certified Movement Analyst (CMA), a designation earned through study at the Laban/Bartenieff Institute of Movement Studies, Dils worked with Laban-based movement analysis as part of graduate studies in the Department of Dance at The Ohio State University and as part of doctoral work in Performance Studies at New York University. Laban-based analysis and description is an important part of her ongoing writing and teaching.⁵

While neither of us had extensive formal training in anthropology or had written ethnography, we had some familiarity with current trends in those fields. Crosby had taken several

courses in anthropology during her doctoral studies, and had conducted a research inquiry on anthropological methodology comparing and contrasting the interpretive and positivist paradigms. Dils's doctoral studies focused on the interdisciplinary study of performance and was heavily influenced by cultural anthropology. We were both familiar with texts that analyze traits of West African dance forms or that point to the Africanist nature of American concert and vernacular dance forms (see Asante 1990; Dixon-Gottschild 1996; Emery 1988; Hazzard-Gordon 1990; Thompson 1974, 1983).

We shared an attraction to experimental trends and conceptual risk-taking in interpretive anthropology and were drawn to ethnographies that employ an interpretive frame. Sally Ann Ness's *Body, Movement and Culture* (1992), Cynthia Jean Cohen Bull's *Sharing the Dance* (1990, under the name Novack), John Miller Chernoff's *African Rhythm and African Sensibility* (1979), and Steven Feld's *Sound and Sentiment* (1982) were important to our work.⁶ Particularly attractive in these works is an emphasis on description that honors individual and cultural experience, especially as understood in the body. Ness's and Bull's dance ethnographies are especially interesting for their rich explanations of movement. Both write from the perspective of a participant, a strategy that emphasizes bodily experience, and that opens up a wealth of interpretive possibilities. At the same time, they include information that is clearly drawn from an observer's perspective, a strategy that emphasizes the look or aesthetic product of performance. These works served as beginning points in our conversations about the balancing of participation and observation.

When we began our project in 1994, we knew only that we would analyze and describe Crosby's fieldwork tapes, film from other sources, and live performance. We worked out our methodology as the project unfolded, guided by our individual needs, backgrounds, and shared concerns and interests. Our use of Laban-based analysis to examine Ghanaian dance and music-based jazz dance was of particular concern. Like all analysis systems, the Laban system reflects the movement experiences and preferences of its makers, in this case Laban and his European and European-American followers. Might the parameters of the Laban system skew our understanding of the forms we studied?

The lack of fit between the Laban system and the dances we studied prompted a number of dialogues about the difficulty of determining a culturally appropriate way of analyzing dance. In a postcolonial world, issues of cultural representation and appropriation still hold, but mix with those of the trans- and intracultural. Who should speak of and for the cultural products and processes of a particular group, using what knowledge base, is an increasingly complex question, as is the identification of a dance form as being the exclusive domain of any particular group. Would (should) a Ghanaian scholar apply Laban-based analysis to Ghanaian dance with a greater, or simply a different, integrity than an American scholar? Is the problem with the analysis system, with who uses the system, or with drawing unwarranted conclusions based on the use of the system? One solution to these questions is to approach each project with a context-specific dialogue between individual perspective (delivered with clarity of purpose, approach, and investment) and the tensions of history and current politics.

While we were cautious about our use of the Laban system, we also saw its advantages. First, clear, vivid descriptive language was vital to Crosby's work. While the terminology of Laban-based analysis tends to be dry, the analytic clarity of the system helps the writer to craft compelling descriptions. Second, Crosby wanted to ground her analysis of jazz in how the form felt and operated for dancers, using her own perceptions and those of people she danced

with and interviewed in the field, but she also wanted some systematic counterbalance or cross-check to her own experience and perceptions. Dils's understanding of Laban-based analysis would be helpful here, too. The Laban system encourages first a broad look at, and then a fine analysis of, how movers use and organize their bodies, shape their bodies and the space around them, and mete out their energy, timing, spatial sense, and force to produce physical expression. Using this tool might bring to light aspects of movement Crosby missed because of her own sensibilities and training, or because she emphasized the felt, rather than the observed, aspects of movement. Using Laban-based analysis might help her to coax new insights from her fieldwork videotapes and her other resources, rather than to parrot insights found by other researchers. Working with Dils also provided Crosby with another pair of eyes, another trained sensibility. Our verbal back-and-forth might help to uncover the dense meanings possible in a movement experience.

Knowing that our Laban-based analysis had to inform, rather than override or supplant Crosby's understanding of the dances from fieldwork and other study, we proceeded. Initially, we had different project designs in mind. From her readings, interviews, and movement experiences, Crosby had identified movement elements common to the dances she studied. She was especially interested in an undercurve approach to movement, a swinging down and picking up of weight in the pelvis that appeared common to most of the forms. She was also aware of the intimate relationship between music and dance in Ghanaian and music-based jazz dance forms and of how that relationship influenced the quality, intent, and phrasing of the dances. Crosby wanted to convey the pleasures, sensations, and varied nuances of that undercurve and of intricate musical play to her readers.

Dils was interested in seeing what the "coding" process of movement analysis would yield with these materials. She wanted to do "open" viewing, looking at each performance and performance document individually to develop a full catalogue of movement qualities for each form. Each movement sample would be examined for a full list of variables, including how the dancer uses her/his body and its parts, how the dancer uses body weight, the spatial forms apparent in the movement, the timing of the movement, and so on. Once a full picture of the movement parameters was established, we could pick out the "core movement values" that particularize a form (Lepczyk 1981, 17). From here, comparisons and contrasts might be made between the forms and movement links between them established (see Pforsich 1978).

We began by doing informal coding, viewing Crosby's fieldwork tapes from Ghana, Burkina Faso, and New York City.⁷ As we discussed the movement, Dils wanted to delay making descriptive choices, trying to give herself time to organize her observations and determine core movement values. We found ourselves involved in lengthy discussions about how and what to view. For example, dancers in the Burkina Faso tape repeatedly bent the body slightly forward from the hips, keeping a supple spine and bent knees. These are at once shapes in space, a specific use of body parts, and an active reinitiation of weight. Working from her physical understanding, Crosby wanted to focus in on the use of the pelvis and weight.

While these aspects were apparent in the movement, Dils thought the dancers' shapes should not be discounted. Initially, we held moving and observing apart, thinking of Crosby's movement knowledge and the analysis we might do through coding as yielding insights and observations that could be cross-checked. Ultimately, we found the "open" viewing process too cumbersome, too detailed, and inappropriately time-consuming for a three-month project.

We wanted some way of honing in on the core movement values without losing sight of unique aspects of the movement samples.

A Dialogue with the Experiential: Moving and Observing

A Dialogue Between People, Texts, and Types of Knowledge

We found an organizing methodology—one that dialogued between moving and observing—when we began dancing. We reexperienced Crosby's fieldwork dance experiences, reenacting dances and movements from her tapes. Crosby was intimately familiar with these dances and movement styles through fieldwork experiences and previous training. Acting as teacher and dance partner, she assisted Dils in bringing the movements into her body. We then hammered out descriptions of what was observed and felt, going back to moving to check and refine our descriptions. From here, we discussed what held the dances together as movement experiences, the subtle differences among commonalities, and finally, what made each experience unique. This process interwove observation, dancing, dialogue, and writing in multiple sessions with the same dance material, constantly reviewing the dances and refining our descriptions. As we learned from each other, Crosby became a more observant mover, and Dils a better moving observer. We continued this process with live performance and film and video footage from public and private archives that we would see only once.⁸

As we worked toward understanding the movement evidence of Crosby's dissertation, we developed a context-specific analysis system that grew from the attributes of the forms we studied, Crosby's desire to write from a dancer's perspective, our individual trainings, and the needs of the study. In so doing, we adapted the Laban system, using the Laban parameters as points of discussion, to get at the salient aspects and bodily orchestration of particular dances and make comparisons between the forms. From within the Laban system, we could recognize that the relationships between dancers and musicians were important, but not get at how those relationships operated. This information came from Crosby's experience and from dialogues with Ghanaian and music-based jazz dancers and musicians. The need to adapt the Laban system—or any analysis system—to suit the project at hand has been noted by other researchers. Jane Desmond recognizes that “[g]iven the demands of cross-cultural and intracultural research, no one system will be sufficient” and calls for the development of more sophisticated means of understanding movement and its historical and cultural significances (Desmond 1997, 50).

For her research on contact improvisation, Cynthia Jean Cohen Bull devised a coding system that she used to organize three year's worth of movement observations. Her coding sheets “encouraged attention to four major categories of movement. Three categories—‘Body Use,’ ‘Space/Shape,’ and ‘Efforts’—were derived from Laban analysis, and the fourth category—‘Choreographic Elements’—was derived from compositional and presentational techniques and devices in dance” (Bull 1988a, 120). She notes the European bias of the Laban system and states that certain aspects of the Laban system are appropriate to studying contact improvisation. It is evident from her book that the Laban system was only part of her movement analysis tools. She also wrote from the perspective of a person learning the form, discussing the physical sensations—a monitoring of inner attitudes not considered by traditional Laban parameters—and the social implications of aspects of contact improvisation such as falling, weight sharing, and disorientation, an interpretative act beyond the Laban frame.

In the process of working with these materials, we moved from thinking of moving and observing as oppositional to realizing their dialogical nature. In our study, it was apparent that moving and observing could produce different results but both were related to bodily knowledge and to theoretical knowledge about the use of the body. Dils could not see particular aspects of the movement we studied with the depth or specificity that Crosby could. While it was evident that the phrasing of Ghanaian and music-based jazz dancers bore a relationship to accompanying music, the intricacies of those relationships were not evident to Dils. Even in slow motion, the relationships were elusive. But Crosby could take apart these relationships and explain how they worked. Her training gave her a particular kind of analytic vision that Dils did not have.

On the other hand, Dils could make finer discriminations between various uses of weight than Crosby could. This occurred, perhaps, because of Dils's habit of comparison (which use of the Laban system encourages) and because the Laban system allows one to see a nexus of elements in relationship. For example, as the study proceeded, our concerns about seeing body shape versus feeling the release of weight in the pelvis became a realization of the relationship between these components and how that relationship changes from dance to dance.

We found a connection between our individual trainings and our abilities to understand movement; both bodily and theoretical knowledge impinged on our ability to perform, see, and analyze movement. In their report of a 1988 study, Allison Jablonko and Elizabeth Kagan add the additional insight that Laban-based work is particularly reliant on bodily knowledge. Jablonko, an anthropologist studying the Maring people of Papua, New Guinea, and Kagan, a CMA, carried out a movement analysis project that involved viewing Jablonko's video footage. They were working to derive cultural movement style—to find core movement values for the Maring—and to see if Kagan, although unfamiliar with any aspect of Maring culture, could use Laban Movement Analysis to "derive useful observations that would extend traditional anthropological analyses. . ." (Jablonko and Kagan 1988, 148).

Jablonko and Kagan note interesting differences between Jablonko's usual way of analyzing movement and Kagan's LMA work. Jablonko normally looks at small dimensions of movement, just the range of motion in joints, for example, and charts these on two-dimensional graphs. Comparisons can then be made by charting change over time. According to Jablonko and Kagan, "the synthesizing function is performed not by the body-mind complex of the viewer, but in a mechanical fashion which can take the researcher vast quantities of time to arrive at quite simple conclusions." In contrast, they continue,

Information arrived at through LMA training and observation is more easily retained through body memory and becomes an automatic and cumulative resource upon which subsequent observations are based. Kagan did not have to memorize sets of numbers; rather, she experienced the movement kinesiethically as patterns and sequences of shape, space, bodily configurations and dynamics. She could then describe these perceptions using LMA terminology. This kinesthetic sympathy with the observed movement provides rapid and efficient access to the perception of complex patterns. (Jablonko and Kagan 1988, 161–162)

The process of observation, at least when using Laban-based methodology, is an informed version of the process of learning movement. Movement is observed and made sense of through the body (whether or not it is actually performed) by moving from familiar movement patterns to realize differences and eventually learn new patterns. The body acts as a notebook, storing information and providing a means of comparison. The movement analysis process does not have the thoroughness and subtlety of learning a dance to the point of mastery, but it is a physical learning process. Doing and observing can provide different information about movement, but (unless some other process is in force, such as Jablonko's mathematical abstractions) both tap body memory and depend on former movement experiences to help make sense of the new.

Realizing the dialogical nature of observing and moving allowed us a new understanding of what it means to write from a dancer's perspective, combining both kinds of information toward a single goal. Sally Ness's methodological statement was also helpful: "My strategy in developing this ethnographic account has been to write of Cebu City and its sinulog forms by moving among several perspectives, all of which were useful to an ethnographer studying choreographic phenomena with a performer's orientation" (1992, 16). She goes on to enumerate the perspectives important to her research, including those of visitor, performer, and traditional social scientist, and those of other performers and audience members.⁹ While multiple perspectives are considered, Ness underscores that these serve her understanding as performer.

The richness of the dialogue between our positions as observant mover and moving observer is evident in the following descriptions, the first written by Crosby and excerpted from her dissertation, the second written by Dils (aided by Crosby's insights) in the course of writing this article. Both reflect an evening we spent swing dancing at Well's bar and supper club on Adam Clayton Powell Boulevard and 132nd Street, New York City. At Well's, patrons walk through the bar to enter the adjacent supper club for music and dancing. The Harlem Renaissance Orchestra is at one end of the room with a small, carpeted dance floor in front of them. The band is backed by a window that faces the street, and passersby frequently stop to listen and watch.

Crosby: In the summer of 1994, I had a chance to swing dance at Well's with Buster Brown, jazz tap dancer and original member of the Copasetics. Brown was scatting as he danced, an improvised singing of nonsensical syllables that interpret rhythmical phrasings through the voice. Through the touch of his hand, particularly during each swingout (the improvisational section of the Lindy where couples break close body contact but maintain a hold of one hand each), I could feel the relationships between his dancing, his scat rhythms, the music, and myself as his dance partner.

Through the touch of his hand, Brown transmitted a sinking into swing motion and the drop in the bottom of the swing as he released into gravity, then rebounded, all while continuously hovering over the beat and the voicing of the musicians and my own movements. He transmitted how he placed his feet firmly down on the face of his chosen articulated beats, with confidence and assurance, and how he played with the beat, pushing and pulling on it to hesitate or anticipate it. I sensed through the touch of his hand how

and when he weaved in and out of the Lindy structure, and how he then moved the structure improvisationally in the moment of performance...(Crosby 1995, 215–216)

Dils: Some of the most expert dancers at Well's were middle-aged ladies in elegant dresses and high-heeled shoes, moving with their partners on a crowded, postage-stamp-sized dance floor. Their hovering contrasted to that of dancers we had seen (and danced in imitation of) earlier. Dancers from Burkina Faso, for example, did an active version of hovering, dropping, and rebounding their weight in vigorous undercurves as they stepped across the dance space. A woman carrying a baby on her back performed less vigorously and all of the dancers' movements got smaller when they got close enough together to pass palm fronds over each other's heads. The size of the movement seemed related to the large dance space and to the fact that they could move as individuals, tempering their movement when they had to contact others. In swing dancing, taken from movies of the 1920s to 1940s, and from archival film clips, hovering took on a different physical necessity. Here, we were moving together as partners, literally giving and receiving movement signals through pushing and pulling movements of our linked hands. The hovering was either subtle, a pliability needed for rapid response to a partner, or a great drop and rebound needed for a jump or a turn. The ladies at Well's kept their pelvises active in order to respond to their partners and to the music, but more importantly this activity gave them a saucy, flirty air.

Our descriptions allow readers to telescope in, feeling the energy between two dancer's hands, then out to consider the action on the dance floor and its relationship to other dancing. While Dils's description did not appear in Crosby's dissertation, this kind of dialogue fed Crosby's dancerly understanding and analysis.

Dialogue: Interpretation and Constructing Meaning

A Dialogue Between People and Levels of Analysis

Our analyses and descriptive choices, selecting the words that would capture what we felt was most important about the movement we experienced, were our most basic interpretations. Even these were arrived at through dialogue. Crosby began the project thinking of the pelvic action of the dances she studied as an undercurve, but as we experienced more and more movement and reviewed the video samples, we found the movement of the pelvis was sometimes too small to be a discernible undercurve. It was, rather, a pliable, constantly regenerating, nearly expectant sense that the mover was ready to go, able to change weight quickly or use the pelvis in a larger drop, swing, or shimmy. This sense we termed "hovering." While a dancer's hovering might blossom into a forceful rebounding of weight or be produced by more or less supple legs and spine, the baseline remained a hovering, an apparent readiness for action. The descriptive movement elements that Crosby had isolated by the end of her research included hovering and an emphasis on rhythmic and musical play in the body. The latter ele-

ment, investigated through Crosby's interviews and movement experience, was not a significant outcome of *our* study, but a factor Crosby considered in dialogue with our findings.

Beyond a compare/contrast/describe analysis Dils could not make any interpretations about the movement we studied. But she could provoke Crosby's memory and, by talking about movement, help Crosby fit movement and other cultural factors together. When we watched videotapes and reenacted movement, we moved something that happened in a crowded compound in Dzodze, Ghana, for example, into a tiny New York City studio apartment. Through movement, Dils knew only a small part of the experience of that event, and what she knew came from the indirect experiences of videotape and word-of-mouth. But she could ask Crosby about her experience of the clothing, the heat, the dust, the voices, the walk to the compound, the sprinkling of European and American tourists and scholars mixed in with the dancers, and the din of the drum.¹⁰ Discussions of the functionality of movement came from this back-and-forth, Dils asking questions for Crosby to consider from within the knowledge of her field experiences.

Jablonko and Kagan provide another illustration of how researchers create meaning through dialogue. Kagan initially found a Maring version of cat's cradle simply wrong; it did not look like the American version. Through conversation with Jablonko and using her LMA training, Kagan realized she was missing the precise formation of shapes with the string and even timing that American girls value in their play. From there, she began to realize that the Maring girls were paying attention to the feel of the string in their mouths and on their fingers. As Kagan and Jablonko continued to analyze footage, they found more and more evidence of an interest in the feel rather than the look of objects or the look and timing of tasks. This observation helped Jablonko to make sense of other field experiences. What Jablonko felt had happened with "utter unpredictability," she now realized was a lack of spatial and time cues that she usually received in her home culture (Jablonko and Kagan 1988, 151–154).

As Jablonko and Kagan's interaction suggests, and as we found in our own work, dialogue provides for an expansion of knowledge and perception that ends in the construction of meaning. Anthropologist Birgit Meyer, influenced by her work with noted anthropologist Johannes Fabian, comments that dialogue is a catalyst for constructions of meaning and that nothing is more exciting to a researcher than the construction of meaning with others in the field (Crosby 1995, 147). Our own exchanges had that exciting sense of construction. Our dialogues and constructions of meaning, however, were but a slice of the dialogues and constructions that occurred during Crosby's fieldwork. Crosby's understanding of rhythmic and musical play in the body as a fundamental movement element of Ghanaian and music-based jazz dance forms came largely from her own movement experiences and her discussions and constructions with Ghanaian and jazz dancers and musicians. These dialogues included the mover/teacher dialogues that occurred among Crosby, her teachers, her students, and those she danced beside during fieldwork. Crosby notes her experience of teaching jazz at the University of Ghana as an example. In one of her earliest classes in Ghana, she counted out a phrase, as would be common in more pop-oriented or Broadway jazz dance classes in the United States. Her students asked questions about the relationships between the movement and the rhythmic phrasing of the music, singing the rhythmic signature of the movement materials with that of the music in a manner similar to scat singing. From this interaction, Crosby made new connections between the differences of pop jazz and music-based jazz, and between the similarities of music-based jazz and the African forms these students practiced.¹¹

Other constructions include conversations with musicians. In a conversation in Peki, Ghana, with master drummer Wilson Akortia, Crosby illustrated the various ways that jazz artists describe jazz by scat singing and by moving and physicalizing those rhythmic scats with the body. "Well," Akortia responded, "then it is like ours" (Crosby 1995, 285). During a conversation with Dr. William Oscar Anku, professor of music at the University of Ghana, Crosby scatted and danced a rhythmic, syncopated movement phrase from jazz choreographer Billy Siegenfeld, while Dr. Anku tapped out the ground beat. Anku then sounded and moved, through gesture, the phrase for himself. "That is just what we do with our music," he commented (Crosby 1995, 297).

Crosby often had multiple experiences with those she interviewed. Consider the dialogue between theory and practice set up between Crosby's above description of dancing with Buster Brown at Well's and information he gave her in an interview:

Buster Brown tells me that when he is dancing jazz, he dances the music rather than dances to the music; jazz dancing is dancing the music. "...You dance the whole arrangement. If you do what the music is saying, you're not dancing to it you're dancing it." For Brown, dancing a tune means listening to musicians as individuals and as an ensemble while also listening to the tempo, the tune, and the lyrics. As a dancer, he hears and catches particular musical voicings and phrases. For example, "...a horn starts playing [in a solo] things he didn't do with the ensemble, you drop down and you go right with just one person...." Or, he will follow changes in the tune, "...you know there's the trumpet section and the brass section, they're going into something and when you do it with them without breaking your rhythm and you catch the flare, you catch a rhythm and get that feeling." (Crosby 1995, 231)

In her dissertation, Crosby dialogued between these varying conversations to enrich the descriptive, analytic, and interpretive possibilities of her text.

There is a marked difference in Crosby's dissertation between our descriptions, which often introduce her chapters and focus on setting and the use of the body and weight, and her interviews with and analysis drawn from interactions with Ghanaian dance experts and American jazz artists. Although Crosby and the many dancers we watched and emulated in our movement analysis project are deeply invested in rhythmic complexity and responses to tone, our descriptions deemphasize these elements. The reasons for this are many, but perhaps Dils's greater experience with describing and performing modern dance and the difficulties of capturing rhythm in prose are foremost.¹²

When Crosby is discussing interviews with Ghanaian dance experts and American jazz artists, most of what she discusses has to do with a physicalization of music. Rhythm is often not described so much as indicated with syllables, beat marks, or in musical notation. The descriptive products of our reenactments and Crosby's interviews are made sense of in the text; the two sides inform each other and are interwoven in analysis to create a richer understanding of jazz. But there is no doubt that movement is experienced and conceived of in radically different ways. Ghanaian dancers and American music-based jazz dancers in Crosby's dissertation think and talk about movement almost at the level of the nervous system as rhythm and music is comprehended and made into motion in conversation with the musicians.

What they do not say is how that feels in the muscles, or how it translates into a relationship to space. The dialogue between these positions allows for a fuller understanding of the dances.

Dialogue: Polyvocality and Authority

A Dialogue With Those Who Shape Texts: Informants, Experts, Authors, Editors, Readers

After months, possibly years, of reading journal articles and books, dancing, interviewing, watching videotapes, making notes, and conferring with colleagues, the researcher leaves the sensitive, multifocused world of research and enters the writing process. Writing requires a new kind of sensitivity and attention, considering, interpreting, and theorizing about the experiential, theoretical, and dialogical fruits of research, and attending to the additional voices of the writing process: editors and preliminary and potential readers. As James Clifford states in the opening quotation of this paper, fashioning a meaningful, comprehensible text presupposes “a controlling mode of authority,” a single authorial voice or other writerly strategy that allows for the pruning and shaping of experience into text.

Crosby wrote from three perspectives: as a dancer voicing her physical understanding of jazz expression and in search of an artistic voice that springs from a legacy of source traditions; as an ethnographer in search of those meanings of jazz dance in various contexts and evolutions; and as an arts educator concerned with the implications of teaching artistic form. A fourth perspective might be as a graduate student concerned with completing a dissertation. Each perspective demands that certain questions be researched and addressed in the final text. In addition to her fieldwork experiences and our reenactments and analyses of those, Crosby’s research included interviews with seventy-four practitioners and researchers in the fields of Ghanaian dance and music, jazz dance and music, arts education, anthropology, ethnography, and history. Her work was informed with seventeen pages of references drawn from readings in those areas.

To bring cohesion to these materials, Crosby anchored her writing in her physical experiences of fieldwork. Movement descriptions began each fieldwork chapter and were interwoven throughout the text as a way to introduce her discussion of other kinds of research. In her use of dance description, Crosby honored both her own interests and current trends in the dance field. Description drawn from a mover’s perspective has been an especially important trend. Dance ethnographer Deidre Sklar writes that

Dance ethnography is unique among other kinds of ethnography because it is necessarily grounded in the body and the body’s experience rather than in texts, artifacts or abstractions...Whatever methods one uses for gathering data...and whatever theoretical frameworks for analyzing...all paths lead back to and from people moving. (1991a, 6)

With personal experience as a base, the dialogical nature of the text unfolds as Crosby incorporates interviews and ideas and information from readings. A dialogical strategy was especially important for Crosby, who was negotiating differences in race, nationality, gender, and age in her presentation of interview materials while validating the experiential as fieldwork data by playing the voices of “experts” against her own perceptions. It was important that Crosby not write as “authority,” but as author, allowing the reader to reexperience her

research, and acting as guide, pointing out what was important, arbitrating differences of opinion, and drawing informed conclusions.

The insertion of the research-self in a finished text reveals the author as an individual, as writing from personal experience of individuals, collected persons, or events. Many dance researchers reveal self in order to make clear their representation of others (whether they are the subjects of educational, ethnographic, critical, or historical scrutiny). The relative privilege of the author in forming those representations, no matter the generosity of their self-revelation, remains. In any project, how a person is ultimately represented in a text is the result of a dialogue between the needs of the project, the researcher's sense of ethics, the practices of the discipline, and, often, university rules and regulations. In her dissertation work, Crosby sent final drafts for cross-referencing and checking to most of those she interviewed, to be sure their statements were not taken out of context or misrepresented. But attitudes and rules about the treatment of "human subjects" vary. Some prefer to have interviewees check and edit the transcripts of interviews, while others feel that the granting of an interview gives the writer permission to use (with integrity and fairness) any material revealed at that interview. In some fields, researchers must obtain permissions and waivers; in others, they rely on a sense of ethics or the boundaries of legalities. And there are trade-offs to be considered. How does the writer balance what an individual would have revealed and/or what they would be happy with as representing themselves with the reader's desire for information, accuracy, and a vivid text?

Finally, while writers may try to control the reading of a text, writing is inevitably recomposed as it is read. We draw an example from Crosby's dissertation defense. Dils saw Crosby's movement descriptions and her descriptive analyses of music-based jazz dance as the shining centerpieces of her dissertation, but other committee members read the text differently. Except for one other, only Dils asked questions about movement and methodology during the defense. The rest of the committee, all arts educators or social scientists, asked questions about the implications of Crosby's work for multicultural and arts education. Beleaguered faculty members often read texts with an eye to information that is relevant to them and their interests. They, perhaps, skimmed or skipped the movement descriptions as specialized information or illustrations. While their varied perspectives made for a rich discussion, the conversation also made clear that each found the text meaningful in very different ways.

In writing our essay, we carefully considered dialogical issues involved in moving between Crosby's dissertation and our own writing and dialogue as a writerly strategy. We thought it important to talk about our experiences of working out a movement-oriented analysis system for Ghanaian and music-based jazz dances and to discuss the importance of dialogue and dialogical process to dance studies research. In so doing, we silenced or deemphasized many of the dancers, choreographers, and musicians who contributed to Crosby's research, while privileging researchers and theorists, a more American, more white group.

We were attracted to the generosity of including extensive dialogue in a text, but found representing ourselves in this text difficult. Should we include our in the field, in New York City, selves of six years ago? Sally Ness has characterized the research-self as

the fallible, multivocal, inconsistent, imaginative individual who existed when the notes were written down, who has since outgrown herself, but who is also an outgrowth of the earlier figure, who maintains a limited substantive continuity as an organism and as a form of memory. (1996, 130)

This self seems vitally important, especially as the self of corporeal experience, the self of Crosby dancing in Ghana or Crosby and Dils dancing in New York. Because of our emphasis on methodology, those selves appear as examples or are reprocessed and covered over by more scholarly and distinguished selves. We do not write from our six-years-ago base of knowledge and experience but represent ourselves, as we are today—Crosby writing from fieldwork in Cuba and Dils from her home in North Carolina—after several more years of reading and thinking through the materials. But even here, our text does not represent our current dialogue, but a text made from a dialogical process. As sentences, paragraphs, and sections were written, they entered a round of comments and rewritings. The text is not so much our dialogues, but the meaning formed through those dialogues.

The mechanics and ethics of including our live and e-mailed conversations in our text were also difficult. Dialogue, as it stands, is too informal and unfinished to be academic text. What would we do about unfinished sentences, failures to spell-check, our habits of speech, and our expressions of personal frustration? Including multiple voices in a text is meant to open the text to multiple interpretations and break down a single, authoritative voice. But making sure the text is lucid enough to make those interpretations possible is a difficult task, one that, potentially, uses the dialogues of the field to create dialogues that are essentially drama or literature. At least in our case, our real dialogues quickly became, not fictionalized necessarily, but certainly enhanced.

Conclusion

In our article, we have used our own experiences to raise issues about dance description, as it comes from the experience of movers and as it might be shaped and influenced by Laban-based movement analysis. We have also discussed concepts of dialogue and dialogical process and of interpretive anthropology as they relate to our project and as they might relate to other dance studies research projects. We organized our discussion by thinking about the importance of dialogue to the experiential, theoretical, and polyvocal processes of research, these adapted from the work of James Clifford.

Our concluding image of our 1994 dance analysis and description project is that of a notebook, or scrapbook, made in writing, in conversation, and in motion. Every experience and perspective possible was included—Crosby's experienced, in-body understanding of the movement we studied, Dils's more distanced approach to it through her understanding of Laban-based analysis, and what experts and culture-bearers said about the dancing. Through the polyvocality of the notebook, Crosby wanted to understand something quite specific: to come to terms with the aesthetic shapings of music-based jazz dance, as seen through her own movement experience and understanding of the historical and cultural construction of the form. Deidre Sklar has stated that "movement performance... [is]...not just visual spectacle but...kinesthetic, conceptual, and emotional experience that depends upon cultural learning" (1991b, 9). For Crosby's dissertation, and in our project, we tried to look at the interaction between the two halves of that statement, product and process.

We found the Laban-based analysis helpful as a check-sheet, a reminder to think about this-or-that aspect of the movement, and as a way to synthesize various aspects of movement into a total picture. Laban work helped us to see, understand, and describe aspects of Ghanaian dance and music-based jazz dance that no dance class or field experience could duplicate, but it could not tell us about their cultural meaning. The inner workings, movement understand-

ings, and aesthetic priorities of Ghanaian dancers and music-based jazz dancers had to be gotten at through different routes and accounted for in different language. Allowing the multiplicity of the scrapbook into her dissertation, controlled and focused by her emphasis on dancerly experience, gave Crosby's work a richness of perspective and reader entry-points.

In realizing the richness of our own interactions, we also realized the potential for drawing meaning from dance experience. Ann Daly argues that movement is dynamic and complex, "a nexus of intersecting elements and systems—semantic, syntactic, formal and contextual—clustered in infinitely complex and varying ways" (1988, 44). With each performance context, historical context, and cultural context, movement gains and changes meaning. Moreover, the meanings derived from research are highly dependent on the purpose of a study and the researcher's experience. How different Crosby's dissertation would have been if she had focused, for example, on a close analysis of the dialogues between dance partners. The concepts of commonality (merely sharing movement elements), mutuality (appreciating or emphasizing commonly held movement), or reciprocity (investing in a give-and-take of movement elements) might lead to new understandings of how dance partners work together, and how this relates to other forms of communication (Graumann 1995, 1–26).

We propose using Clifford's parameters as a methodology for dance studies research. His possibilities are especially valuable because they include the experiential and, considering the dialogical process, lead from research frame to levels of social and cultural analysis. The dialogical process, as it occurs between people, disciplines, modes of research, and texts, can be used as a means of thinking about the researcher's position within her nexus of research materials. The methodology that emerges is not explicit, static, or fixed, but open-ended, changing shape with each research purpose, design, and strategic choice. Working with Clifford's ideas may help researchers and writers push beyond personal and discipline-based habits of thought. The task of the researcher is to fashion a research frame that employs all the possibilities in a creative and dialogical manner that also honors the context and purpose of the study. The task of the author, understanding the discipline-based, social, and cultural implications of her authorial decisions, is to fashion a text that honors and enlivens that research and readies it for dialogues with others.

The authors would like to thank Peg Banks for her assistance in reading, commenting, editing, and preparing this manuscript for publication.

Notes

1. Works by James Clifford (1987) and George Marcus and Michael Fischer (1986) were important to our understanding of the interpretive paradigm.
2. Music-based jazz dance is a form that uses jazz music as primary information for movement invention, particularly during improvisation, in an interactive and conversational manner. Music-based jazz dance tends to swing both rhythmically and physically and is often described as "visualized music" (after Heather Cornell, personal conversation, 1995).
3. Our essay reflects research done in the mid-1990s. We further emphasize the layered dialogues of dance studies research by interacting with the authors of more recent work in our notes. In 2001 Crosby's dissertation, rather than being an application of ethnographic methods to work in arts education, might be considered dance ethnology. Adrienne Kaeppler (2000, 120)

believes that “the focus of dance ethnologists is often on dance content, and the study of cultural context aims at illuminating the dance” as opposed to an anthropological focus on “understand[ing] society through analyzing movement systems.” What we call an attention to “the experiential process of dancing” has been advocated and explored as embodied or somatic study in more recent work, especially by Deidre Sklar (2000). Jane Desmond (2000) discusses important fieldwork-based dance research in the last decade and advocates for an expansion of this approach.

4. The term “context specific” was provided by *Dance Research Journal* editor Julie Malnig and our readers.
5. We use Laban-based movement analysis here to suggest Dils’s use of the Laban system and the terms Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) and Labananalysis when used by other researchers. One of the primary resources for Laban-based description is Dell (1970).
6. A more recent dance ethnography that suggests the interpretive paradigm is Daniel (1995).
7. Fieldwork videotapes included traditional dance performances arranged for recording in Crosby’s Ghanaian village field sites and at the national dance festival in Burkina Faso (a spontaneous performance by a local traditional dance troupe), and a video of a street performance during the same festival granted by permission. The videos were recorded from whatever angle was available to the performance space, but often, performers chose to face the camera. The exception was of the street performance in Burkina Faso, where the video was shot from a side view. Other tapes included music-based jazz dancer Billy Siegenfeld dancing a work he set on Crosby for a rehearsal video, a performance video of a work of choreography performed by Crosby and Katherine Kramer, a performance video of Kramer, and a college Broadway-style jazz dance group in rehearsal. All tapes were recorded from a front view.
8. Film and video footage included vernacular dance footage from the archives of historian Ernie Smith and from the Dance Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts (see Dehn 1950; Harper, et al. n.d.; and *Ringshout* n.d.). Live performance viewings included a music-based jazz class, a Broadway-based class, and swing dancing at Well’s in Harlem.
9. Sally Ness does not discuss how Laban Movement Analysis figures into her research of the sinuolog in her book, *Body, Movement, and Culture*. She is, however, a Certified Movement Analyst (CMA) and, in the acknowledgments for her book, thanks two other CMAs for their help in examining her fieldwork tapes (1992, xi).
10. Such experiences elucidate the somatic mode of attention advocated by Sklar (2000, 72): “To attend in a somatic mode is to apprehend, as felt experience, the kinetic dynamics inherent in movements, images, and sounds.”
11. Scatting, or singing what you dance, is a common practice in music-based jazz dance in the United States. Crosby, also trained in pop and Broadway jazz forms, was only beginning to discover music-based jazz dance when she first taught in Ghana.
12. The importance of adventurous, accurate movement description, as not just an indication of an event, but a writerly transmission of sensory knowledge and analysis is emphasized by Sklar (2000, 73–74): “[R]ather than being an *aesthetic gesture*, writing is an *aesthetic embrace* that invites sensuous opening, almost as if words need to be irresistible, to partner bodily experience at all its levels of intensity, intimacy, and multiplicity.’ In spite of the cliché that what is danced cannot be spoken, the transformative effects of movement are not necessarily ineffable. Words remain permeable to their somatic reverberations.”

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